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31 January 2014

Mr E Jackson
The Principal
Sandown Bay Academy
The Fairway
Sandown
Isle of Wight
PO36 9LH

Dear Mr Jackson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sandown Bay Academy

Following my visit with Howard Dodd and Robert Ridout, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 29 and 30 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. Also, having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the academy's Management Board, the Education Funding Agency, the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education, and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2013

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the amount that is good by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan tasks to match the full range of abilities in their classes and adapt them, as necessary, during lessons to make sure that all students are challenged
 - manage behaviour well so that students are focused on their learning and no one is able to interrupt or disrupt the lesson
 - give students detailed and regular feedback on their work so that they know how to improve it
 - make sure that all lessons help students improve their written and spoken English.
- Raise achievement, especially in English and mathematics, so that all students make at least expected progress and gaps in achievement between different groups close, by:
 - closely monitoring students' performance to identify underachievement
 - rapidly giving support to those students who are in danger of underachieving
 - making sure lessons are fully staffed, especially in English, so that students are properly taught and there are no gaps in their learning, especially for those studying for GCSE.
- Secure the confidence of all students, and of their parents and carers, that the academy will prevent and tackle bullying effectively, by:
 - urgently reviewing anti-bullying policies and procedures
 - sharing policies with students and taking their views into account so that everyone clearly understands what is required and expected of them.
- Strengthen the way in which all leaders and governors improve teaching and drive up achievement by:
 - checking regularly that teaching is good enough and identifying where improvements are needed
 - providing guidance and support to teachers, including the chance to see the best teachers teaching
 - checking that teachers follow up advice and instructions given after lesson observations and act on these successfully so that students' achievement improves
 - holding teachers in all subjects strongly to account for the quality of their teaching and assessment and how well students achieve.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 January 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior staff, members of the management board, and groups of students, and had telephone conversations with a representative from Hampshire Children's Services which is providing support to schools on the island, and a representative from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), the academy's sponsors. During the visit 28 lessons were observed, many jointly with senior staff, and four other lessons were visited briefly. One parent requested contact with inspectors and they were telephoned during the inspection.

Context

Since the previous visit you have taken up post as Principal following the departure of the previous, substantive Principal last November. There has been some reorganisation of responsibilities among the senior team and an associate member of the team has been appointed. The governing body has been disestablished and the management board has taken full responsibility for the governance of the academy.

Achievement of students at the academy

There are clear indications of students' achievement continuing to improve. The outcomes of internal assessments and early entries for GCSE examinations indicate that a significant increase in the proportion of students obtaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is possible this year, to bring this figure nearer to the national average. This is due to an increase in the proportion of students likely to make the progress expected of them in English by the end of Key Stage 4, and some improvement in the proportion making expected progress in mathematics. Also, gaps between the performance of students eligible for the pupil premium and other students in English are showing signs of diminishing. These gaps are not closing in mathematics, however. Improvements in science are less secure. The quality of teaching in science is uneven; some significant variation in its quality was seen during the inspection. Some students feel less confident about how work in science is organised, and feel that they make less progress in this subject than in others.

The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is also showing some improvement. However, such judgements are clouded by unclear and poorly organised ways of gauging the progress of these students. There is little evidence that special provision in place in Key Stage 3 to accelerate the progress of those who arrive with weaker skills in reading and writing is having a good enough impact.

The achievement of sixth form students remains at least secure and is improving in important respects, despite significant changes in its leadership over the last year.

Students continue to learn well, and are well looked after. Their progress is tracked closely, and their welfare is supported strongly and effectively. Expectations of sixth formers are appropriately high; all students are expected move onto higher education, training or employment. Inspectors spoke with students who are confidently targeting Russell Group universities and some aiming to go to Oxford or Cambridge. Many are already holding university offers.

The quality of teaching

The proportion of teaching that is at least good has risen steadily since the previous inspection and now stands at around 60%. There is some outstanding teaching in the academy and some of these teachers are acting as lead teachers, mentoring other staff and providing one-to-one coaching and close support. There is evidence of the good impact of this work, with an appreciable proportion of teaching previously requiring improvement having improved to become good in the current cohort being supported. Nevertheless, some inadequate teaching remains, especially in art and design, and the new Principal is taking decisive steps to address this with appropriate urgency. Too few lessons observed catered for the needs of different groups of students effectively, when this was clearly necessary. However, students are confident that teachers' expectations of them are rising. They said that more is asked of them, and the amount and nature of the extra support provided are usually better.

The quality of teaching is consistently better in the sixth form. Students in Years 12 and 13 speak very highly of the work of their teachers, and are pleased with the quality of the marking and feedback they receive.

There is some improvement evident in the degree to which weaknesses in students' literacy skills are being tackled systematically across the academy. A raft of strategies has been put in place to raise the status of supporting better literacy, including sharing specific approaches with teachers at weekly briefings. This has some way to go before it is established as a coherent programme across the whole academy, but it is a good start. Students' oracy skills are still underdeveloped, despite the 'talk the talk' rewards scheme for good quality verbal contributions.

Marking is still very uneven in quality and impact across subjects and different teachers, but there are indications that a greater proportion is beginning to provide useful feedback to students, and is supporting their learning better. However, some books seen by inspectors had not been marked for too long; others did not reflect whole-academy guidance. Senior staff are well aware of this issue and their regular monitoring is leading to judgements that concur with inspectors' views.

Behaviour and safety of students

Students said that they are pleased with the changes that have come about since the arrival of the new Principal. Several found their own way of saying that they have more pride in their academy now than ever before. They are particularly

appreciative of the new Principal's emphasis on being a strong presence around the site, and his attempts to get to know them and understand their lives here.

Attendance is improving quickly. Overall attendance is now near to the national average. These improvements have come about because the attendance of specific groups of students with previously high rates of absence, for example those eligible for free school meals, has been targeted to good effect.

Behaviour around the site is generally calm. Students treat each other with respect and they are more positive about their work and their working relationships with teachers. They feel well looked after but some are still unsure about asking for help and support from adults in the academy when it may be needed. Some students have behavioural problems, but they are in the minority and their behaviour is moderated through good support and through the use of appropriate sanctions. Rates of exclusion are gradually decreasing.

Students generally behave in a cooperative and compliant manner in lessons. Inspectors saw students responding to teachers' direction and being willing to learn. Interest and enthusiasm were shown in the best lessons and, even in lessons where the teaching was uninspiring, behaviour was not challenging.

A new anti-bullying strategy has been devised with the support of some students. There are strong and clear messages around the academy that bullying is not tolerated. There is some work to be done to secure the active support of students to this strategy; they respect the fact that it is happening, but do not feel very part of it yet, some missing the point by saying that it is irrelevant because bullying does not affect their lives. Despite this, many say that social media are abused sometimes, and unkind things are said about individual students. The academy is seen to respond to this assertively and supportively in order to ensure students know how to stay safe while using the internet.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The new Principal has only been in post nine weeks but he has already revitalised this academy. He has established a strong set of expectations and laid out clear priorities, and has communicated these very effectively to staff, students and parents. This has raised everyone's ambitions and hopes for the future and has brought a new sense of purpose and direction to the academy. Morale is improving as teachers and students begin to sense that the academy is beginning to improve.

The leadership and management of the quality of teaching are becoming much more effective. The range of strategies employed is wide and entirely appropriate to the current needs of staff. There are very useful links with performance management systems being established which aim to make the gains in the quality of teaching, after specific training and support, secure and reliable. Senior staff judge the quality of teaching accurately and judgements across the academy are regularly moderated by external consultants.

The way that information about students' achievements is managed is not yet helping senior staff to communicate this vital information to middle leaders and teachers with sufficient clarity. The means by which Key Stage 3 progress is gauged is particularly confusing. The Principal is well aware of this deficiency and is tackling it.

The quality of middle leadership continues to improve as a direct result of the stronger and clearer messages imparted by senior staff about expectations. Some are supporting the improvements in the work of the academy strongly. A few middle leaders are not good enough teachers, however, and they are not yet leading the improvement of achievement and teaching in their areas, confidently and successfully.

Links with parents are valued but remain underdeveloped. Not all parents know how to work effectively with the academy to raise the achievement and the ambition of their children. The work of the Parent Forum is a good model for how this could evolve; direct and relevant questions are encouraged, and honest answers are provided. This model of transparency is reflected in the Principal's regular drop-in opportunities for parents. Students' views and opinions are now shown considerably more value. Students' feedback about what constitutes good and effective teaching is being used well in steering improvements in the quality of teaching.

Aspects of the curriculum, particularly in Key Stage 3, and the structure of the teaching day are currently under review with a view to improving the quality of learning.

The systems and structures in the academy to meet the needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs are not working well enough yet. There is no real sense of connection between the wide range of provision on offer, and its impact. Part of the problem is that there is a range of ways used to gauge students' progress, but they do not present a coherent picture of achievement. It is good that the new Principal is committed to bringing about improvements in this area. He has commissioned a very detailed examination of the effectiveness of provision for students who are vulnerable to underachievement, with the aim of making support services in the academy much more coherent and streamlined.

The work of the management board has been reorganised to enable it to provide more focused and timely challenge and support to the Principal and senior staff. The gains currently outweigh some reduction in local accountability, there being no parent governors now. Board members have a useful range of skills, very relevant to the needs of the academy at this time. They continue to show commitment to improving the effectiveness of the work of the academy.

External support

Actions taken by the sponsors, AET, since the previous monitoring visit, have enabled the academy to begin making progress. AET brought about the change in the leadership of the academy, appointing a Principal who has started to make the changes that are necessary. The sponsors also undertook the reorganisation of governance to reform the management board. They continue to offer close support for the strategic development of the academy. They maintain close links with the Principal through regular meetings that involve sharing priorities and identifying any extra support required. The better leadership in the academy is now able to make good use of this provision, which has included maintaining the useful mathematics, English and special educational needs consultancy support. The provision of an improvement adviser is another source of challenge and support for the academy's work.

Hampshire local education authority school improvement services continue to maintain good links with the academy, and they continue to broker any support that is necessary. They describe the quality of working relationships between them and the new Principal as rich and profitable, involving open and robust dialogue about academy improvement strategies. For example, there are plans to establish links with specialist leaders of education (SLEs), the support provision established across the island includes English and mathematics networks. There is a school improvement seminar planned for March, involving several of Her Majesty's Inspectors and the good support for newly qualified teachers in the academy continues.